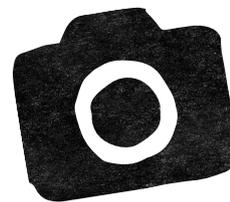
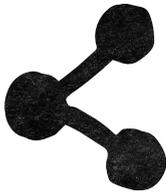




Online Sexual Harassment

Advice for foster carers
of 9-17 year olds



The thing that is happening online but nobody talks about

The online world can be hugely beneficial for the young person you care for. It can help to build friendships, and reduce feelings of isolation but life online is not without its challenges. **Online sexual harassment** between children and their peer group is something young people are likely to be seeing online, even if they are not directly involved.



What is online sexual harassment?

It is a specific form of online bullying, that can include:

- Sexual comments, gossip, or rumours
- Posting photos of parts of other children's bodies to embarrass them
- Editing photos to make them sexual
- Sharing, or threatening to share, someone else's sexual images
- Receiving unwanted sexual requests, comments and images

It is hard for young people to know what to do

When it is other young people doing or saying these things it can be very hard for a young person to know what to do or how to challenge it. They may not even realise that what they are experiencing is not ok until it has been occurring for a while or until it happens to them or someone they know.

Barriers that stop young people asking for help:

You might be concerned about what is happening online or that they are keeping something worrying to themselves. Here are some of the reasons children in care may be reluctant or slow to talk about these issues:

- **Too embarrassed**
- **Worried** about what would happen next
- **Worried** about being targeted by those involved
- **Worried** about getting in trouble or disappointing their foster or birth family
- **Unsure** if it was serious enough
- **Unsure** that adults can help

How do young people want you to help?

Discussing topics like this can be difficult for you and them. The nature of your situation could present an added challenge too, as the relationship with your child may just be developing. Young people have told us, however, that they do want to talk about this and how they would like their carers to support them:

Be

- **Available to talk to**, even if it seems like we may not need you
- **Reassuring and understanding**
- **Patient**
- **Open and honest**
- **Willing to take us seriously**, and admit if you don't know something
- **Willing to ask** us how we want to be helped

Avoid

- **Overreacting** and getting angry
- **Judging** or blaming us
- **Assuming** you know how we feel
- **Threatening** to or taking away access to the internet
- **Overriding** or belittling our emotions
- **Taking it as a criticism** of your parenting
- **Shaming** us for our friends or relationships

Start a conversation

It is important to talk to young people about their lives online. Here are some ways that you can create a safe environment for those conversations:

- Regularly make time to listen and be available for a chat; just the two of you, with no agenda and no distractions.
- Let your child know that they can come to you with any problem they have, and you will be there for them. They may need regular reassurance.
- Use a distancing technique – ask about what other young people at school are going through or dealing with online, so they don't have to talk about first-hand experience.
- Be aware of your child's vulnerabilities and individual needs. Follow the care plans in place and work collaboratively with others like your child's social worker.

Further information...

For more information about how you can help to support your child with the issue of online sexual bullying and harassment:

childnet.com/OSHparents

For specific advice for foster carers around online safety:

childnet.com/resources/foster-carers-and-adoptive-parents

For general advice around online safety and how to talk about it with young people:

childnet.com/resources/lets-talk-about-life-online



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